



News Release

Pediatricians, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists and Children's Hospitals Declare National Emergency in Children's Mental Health

For Release:

10/19/2021

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AAP, AACAP and CHA call on policymakers at all levels of government to act swiftly to address mental health crisis

WASHINGTON, DC— Today, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) together representing more than 77,000 physician members and more than 200 children's hospitals, [declared](#) a national state of emergency in child and adolescent mental health and are calling on policymakers to join them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a serious toll on children's mental health as young people continue to face physical isolation, ongoing uncertainty, fear and grief. Even

before the pandemic, mental health challenges facing children were of great concern, and COVID-19 has only exacerbated them.

“Children's mental health is suffering. Young people have endured so much throughout this pandemic and while much of the attention is often placed on its physical health consequences, we cannot overlook the escalating mental health crisis facing our patients,” said AAP President Lee Savio Beers, MD, FAAP. “Today's declaration is an urgent call to policymakers at all levels of government – we must treat this mental health crisis like the emergency it is.”

The numbers paint an alarming picture. Between March and October 2020, the [percentage](#) of emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies rose by 24 percent for children ages 5-11 and 31 percent for children ages 12-17. There was also a more than 50 percent [increase](#) in suspected suicide attempt emergency department visits among girls ages 12-17 in early 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019.

Additionally, many young people have been impacted by loss of a loved one. Recent data [show](#) that more than 140,000 U.S. children have experienced the death of a primary or secondary caregiver during the COVID-19 pandemic, with children of color disproportionately impacted.

“We were concerned about children's emotional and behavioral health even before the pandemic. The ongoing public health emergency has made a bad situation worse. We are caring for young people with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, their communities, and all of our futures. We cannot sit idly by. This is a national emergency, and the time for swift and deliberate action is now,” said AACAP President, Gabrielle A. Carlson, MD.

Amy Wimpey Knight, president of CHA added, “We are facing a significant national mental health crisis in our children and teens which requires urgent action. In the first six months of this year, children's hospitals across the country reported a shocking 45 percent increase in the number of self-injury and suicide cases in 5- to 17-year-olds compared to the same period in 2019. Together with the AAP and the AACAP we are sounding the alarm on this mental health emergency.”

In the declaration, the groups emphasize the disproportionate toll on young people in communities of color and how the ongoing struggle for racial justice is inextricably tied to the worsening mental health crisis.

"Children and families across our country have experienced enormous adversity and disruption. The inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color," the groups stated in the declaration.

The organizations are urging policymakers to take several actions, such as increasing federal funding to ensure all families can access mental health services; improving access to telemedicine; supporting effective models of school-based mental health care; accelerating integration of mental health care in primary care pediatrics; strengthening efforts to reduce the risk of suicide in children and adolescents; and addressing workforce challenges and shortages so that children can access mental health services no matter where they live.

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American Academy of Pediatrics

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information, visit www.aap.org and follow us on Twitter @AmerAcadPeds.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) promotes the healthy development of children, adolescents, and families through advocacy, education, and research. Child and adolescent psychiatrists are the leading physician authority on children's mental health. For more information, please visit www.aacap.org.

Children's Hospital Association

The Children's Hospital Association is the national voice of more than 200 children's hospitals, advancing child health through innovation in the quality, cost and delivery of care. For more information visit www.childrenshospitals.org.